

DHSS Among Founding Members of National My Healthy Weight; Medicaid Program to Offer Treatment Visits for Obesity Starting in 2019

NEW CASTLE (Jan. 2, 2018) – In embracing one of the policy objectives of Governor John Carney’s Action Plan for Delaware, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) has become a founding member of the national My Healthy Weight, a first-ever collective initiative offering obesity prevention and treatment for individuals of all ages. Delaware is one of nine founding members of this public-private initiative developed by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and the Bipartisan Policy Center, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

In Governor Carney’s Action Plan, his transition team recommended that DHSS launch a statewide effort to reduce the impact of obesity as a way to improve health outcomes and reduce health costs. About two-thirds of Delaware adults are at an unhealthy weight, either obese or overweight, and half of all Delawareans don’t get regular physical activity. In 2014, about 11 percent of Delaware adults reported having diabetes, with that percentage rising to 18.6 percent for Delawareans with incomes below \$15,000, compared with 7.8 percent for those who make \$50,000 or more per year.

Starting in January 2019, Medicaid clients with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher will have access to at least 12 visits a year with a health care professional to support healthy weight. Individuals with a BMI of 25 or higher and specific cardiovascular health risks and children with at-risk

BMI's will also be offered visits with health care professionals. Further support will be provided for eligible individuals to access community-based programs focused on obesity prevention and treatment.

"My Healthy Weight offers the opportunity for DHSS to provide consistent coverage through our Medicaid program to thousands of clients who are at an unhealthy weight," Governor Carney said. "This initiative will improve the quality of life for many Delawareans, offer us new ways to prevent obesity, and help us reduce the impact of such chronic conditions as diabetes, hypertension and cancer. I am grateful to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, the Bipartisan Policy Center and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for believing in our ability to build a healthier Delaware."

Delaware joins a collaborative of health care leaders from across the nation, including private and public payers and employers, who have joined together in this innovative pledge. The initiative will provide millions of Americans with consistent coverage to support healthy weight change.

"With obesity and diabetes at epidemic rates in our state, My Healthy Weight offers us a way to provide consistent coverage to support healthy weight change and bring down our statewide rates," said DHSS Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a board-certified family physician. "We know that poverty is the number one social determinant of health, so we are proud to offer this connection to care to our Medicaid clients as an important step forward in preventing and treating obesity in our state."

"Each founding member in My Healthy Weight is a leader in the fight to combat this national public health crisis," said Dr. Howell Wechsler, CEO, Alliance for a Healthier Generation. "By covering obesity prevention and treatment for members of all ages, they are taking a bold action to support better health at the most fundamental levels. This proactive, preventive

initiative will make our entire health care system better and will improve millions of lives.”

More than one in three U.S. adults has obesity, with obesity care costing as much as \$210 billion per year nationwide. Physical inactivity, obesity, and related chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cancer, and hypertension, constitute some of the most challenging and costly public health threats facing America.

“Health care is changing rapidly in America and prevention is too often an afterthought or left out of the conversation entirely,” said Bipartisan Policy Center’s Chief Medical Advisor Dr. Anand Parekh. “The founding members of My Healthy Weight are putting a historic stake in the ground to say that they value obesity and chronic disease prevention, which represents a fundamental and long overdue shift in the way we think about health care in this country.”